

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

SUBJECT: AIR FORCE TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

STATEMENT OF:

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MANPOWER, PERSONNEL AND SERVICES

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UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

For the past 70 years, the Total Force Airmen of America's Air Force have been breaking barriers as members of the finest joint warfighting team in the world. America's Airmen are highly trained and ready to fly, fight and win our nation's wars; however, these remarkable warriors and their families are feeling the strain associated with 26 years of ongoing overseas contingency operations, disaster relief missions, and funding constraints. As we look to the future, we continue to focus on our primary goal of supporting Air Force and Joint missions, as well as preparing our Airmen for a successful civilian life after transitioning from military service. Air Force leadership remain fully engaged and firmly committed to accomplishing these aims.

Since the Air Force last appeared before Congress to discuss the Program in 2015, we have steadfastly focused on continuously improving support to our transitioning Airmen and their families in accordance with the Veterans Opportunity to Work to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. Our redesigned curriculum directs completion of mandated TAP activities for all eligible service members. Compliance requires completion of a pre-separation counseling that for retiring members can be scheduled 24 months before retiring, and for separating Airmen can attend up to 12 months beforehand. Additional mandated activities include the Department of Labor Employment Workshop, Veterans Administration Benefits Briefings I and II, and the commander or designee approved Capstone review that verifies Career Readiness Standards have been met.

Furthermore, we instituted a waiver for National Guard and Reserve Airmen to relieve repeated Program attendance requirements following each 180-day tour of active duty if they are immediately returning to active duty (i.e. subsequent 180-day tour) or are guaranteed follow-on civilian employment. These actions illustrate our commitment to the readiness of our Airmen, as well as to continuously improving and refining our Transition Assistance Program.

The 2017 Government Accountability Office study identified six recommendations to improve transparency in reporting Program participation rates and monitoring participation timeliness and access to supplemental 2-day tracks, among other items. We concur or partially concur with five of the six recommendations.

Specifically, we did not concur with the recommendation for the Department to monitor and report on the extent to which Service Members who elect to participate in supplementary 2-day tracks are able to receive training. The Air Force focuses on ensuring transitioning Airmen meet Career Readiness Standards, and the additive 2-day tracks were developed and made available on a voluntary basis to assist Airmen and supplement the Standards.. The additional 2-day tracks are electives available for all Airmen via a classroom setting and online through Joint Knowledge Online. While the Department does track the 2-day class attendance, we would like to highlight that Standards attainment is the overarching goal. That said, we will work with our partners to identify whether access or availability barriers exist to Airmen who desire to attend the optional 2-day tracks.

Additionally, we partially-concurred with the study's recommendation that the Department publicly report performance and career readiness attainment for all Program-eligible Total Force Airmen rather than exclude those for whom data are missing, or clarify the extent of the missing data. We acknowledge our participation rate information collection system lacked the fidelity to account for all Program-related data, resulting in missing data on some Airmen who may or may not have completed requirements. Specifically, our FY16 Agency Priority Goals performance measures provided to the public did not provide a clear explanation regarding the exclusion of the missing separation data from the reported performance totals. It was never our intent to misrepresent the Act's reported performance measures. Therefore, in FY17, we addressed the missing and unknown information concern by submitting language with the Office

of Secretary of Defense's Agency Priority Goals performance measures data. Our intent is to ensure a clear description of the extent of the missing and unknown data is included along with the reported compliance rates for appropriate context. We are also working to reduce the occurrence of missing and unknown information and to improve our ability to track critical data required to validate the Act's compliance for all transitioning Airmen.

Lastly, we partially concurred with Government Accountability Office's recommendation that the Department provide commanders access to timeliness, 2-day tracks, and the use of online Transition Assistance Program data. We partially concurred because we agree this is useful information for installation command leadership; however, it is already provided to commanders regularly through our Airman and Family Readiness Centers.

As we continue to look for every opportunity to improve transition assistance for our Total Force Airmen and their families, we acknowledge tracking participation in the Program is valuable for ensuring Airmen receive effective transition assistance. The Air Force currently has the ability to retrieve data documenting when an Airman begins the Program process (via the Pre-Separation/Transition Counseling signature date) and his or her separation date to validate timeframe compliance. However, currently collected information will not allow for parsing out Airmen with short-notice separations (i.e., medical evaluation board decisions, disciplinary reasons, etc.) who could not adhere to the prescribed timeframes. The capability to extract such information is critical for proper interpretation of the data and use of this data for future Program improvements. We will research the information technology requirements and associated costs to procure this capability as we continue to work to improve our Program compliance.

In addition to improved data reporting, the Air Force continues to change its Transition Assistance Program culture by embracing a "begin with the end in mind" framework. We recognize some Airmen will transition to civilian life before retirement eligibility and we prepare

our Airmen for civilian life from the start of their military careers. We do this by leveraging our existing professional development programs as touchpoints in the Military Life Cycle Transition model along with encouraging greater cooperation between the various offices collaborating on transition initiatives. For example, for years, enlisted Airmen have been required to attend the First Term Airmen's Center program at their first permanent duty station. During this multi-day program, Airmen are introduced to many topics--including professional development opportunities and a four-hour financial readiness lesson, which includes developing a personal budget to help foster financial success, and ultimately mission readiness. Airmen are also introduced to the Military Life Cycle, which showcases how transition assistance information will be addressed throughout their career. Our Transition Assistance Program's Military Life Cycle touchpoints also include reenlistment, deployment, and permanent change of station counselings as well as off-duty education briefings and professional development information sessions. All aspects are designed to help prepare Airmen for success in the civilian sector after transitioning from military service.

CONCLUSION

Airmen and their families serve, dedicated to answering our nation's call, making sacrifices for the good of the mission. We do everything we can to foster their success while in uniform, as well as during their transition from the military. Investments in them are inextricably linked to the Air Force's ability to recruit, train, develop, support and retain a world-class, all-volunteer Force. The Air Force remains committed to ensuring Airmen are ready for the challenges and opportunities of civilian life and we extend a great deal of gratitude to our private sector partners in supporting the ease of transition. With continued Congressional backing and the collective commitment of our interagency partners and Air Force leadership, we will ensure America's Total Force Airmen are ready when they transition to the private sector.